

# Dry Eye Syndrome

## A Sign of Overactive Thyroid

There's something to be said for finding a doctor you like and sticking with him or her. That goes for eye doctors too. Over time, that doctor will get to know you and track your health each time you visit. And, continuity is tops when it comes to better healthcare. VSP network doctor Bryan Granger, O.D., knows from personal experience what a plus it is to see patients visit after visit.

It helped him figure out what was going on with one patient's complaint of dry, irritated eyes.

The middle-aged woman complained that her eyes were "dry, gritty and puffy at times," he remembers. Dr. Granger had two main questions he wanted to investigate more.

The first was if the patient was actually suffering dry eye syndrome. This condition, which you might have seen pharmaceutical ads about, is a chronic disorder. The eyes simply don't produce enough lubricating moisture to keep them comfortable. It can be painful, annoying, and even cause eye tissue scarring – and that's not good for vision.

The other question was whether the dry eye was actually due to something more systemic – hyperthyroidism. It's where the thyroid gland produces too much of the important hormone. And, Dr. Granger's patient had mentioned she had hyperthyroidism during her initial medical history discussion with him. The condition can trigger dry eye, on top of other things.

“Their vision could have been saved, if only they'd managed their illness better.”

So, Dr. Granger took a careful look at her cornea, the transparent front part of the eye. He did indeed find several signs of hyperthyroidism-related dry eye syndrome. Lack of moisture, inflammation and irritation were big clues. So was the slight bulging of her eyeball – caused by the tissue swelling.

"This patient first visited me a year ago for a regular yearly eye exam, and I was glad she did," says the 39-year-old optometrist, who practices in New Iberia, La. "Over the years, I've had several cases like hers, in which a patient with a thyroid disorder was also struggling with dry eye.

"Fortunately, making the connection between the dry eye and the underlying disorder made the eye problem easier to treat. Initially, I prescribed lubricating eye drops. Two weeks later, I checked her progress and prescribed an eye ointment for use at bedtime.

Given a few months of treatment, Dr. Granger's patient saw improvement. Her eyes were more comfortable. She also had escaped the corneal scarring that tags along with dry eye syndrome. Notes the doctor: "The risk here is that scarring caused by untreated thyroid-related dry eye can sometimes erode vision, or even destroy it."

"But that didn't happen with this patient. As a matter of fact, I just saw her again yesterday for her annual checkup – and she told me she's experiencing very little discomfort. She's seeing well with a minimum of eye medications.

"For me, her experience emphasizes the importance of that yearly eye exam, especially with patients who have an underlying medical condition. Because I know this patient's history, I can observe her year to year and make sure we protect her precious eyesight!"